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larger mounds. For ten thousand dollars a large part of the site could be acquired and systematically dug; much smaller gifts will make it possible to excavate interesting sections of the city of Saul and Jonathan.

THE EXCAVATIONS AT ASCALON

BY DIRECTOR ALBRIGHT

Ascalon is a name to conjure with. Few cities in the Old World have had a more romantic history than this, from the time when its fleets according to Greek tradition, held the thalassocracy of the eastern Mediterranean to its romantic destruction by its own suzerain, Saladin, who thus avoided its impending capture by the Lion Heart. "*Wallah*," he is reported to have said, "I would rather see my children perish than lose Ascalon!"

Ashkelon (to use the Hebrew form) first comes on the stage of written history with the wars of conquest which the Pharaohs of the eighteenth and nineteenth Egyptian dynasties waged in Palestine. We learn, however, from the recent excavations that it was already occupied by paleolithic man, more than ten thousand years ago, though so far no clear traces of the following neolithic have appeared. During the long generations of the fourth and third millenniums it must have been captured again and again by raiding Pharaohs, from the time when Lower Egypt was the center of a flourishing and civilized state, with its foci at Tanis and Sais, down through the empires of the first, fourth and sixth dynasties to the final collapse of the Hyksos Empire, under onslaughts from Mesopotamia and Upper Egypt. It submitted with a bad grace to an Egyptian governor and the humiliation of paying taxes, and rebelled for the last recorded time in the reign of Rameses the Great, whose son Merneptah recaptured the city in the same campaign in which the name of Israel appears for the first time in profane history. A generation later the fleets of the Philistines and their allies commenced serious raids on the Syrian coast. Ashkelon, in common with the other towns of the sea-shore, suffered severely from their incursions, and finally was occupied by the Philistines about 1170 B. C., after the strong arm of Rameses III was no longer stretched out over the land, to cow the "miserable Asiatics" into submission, and to protect them as well from foreign irruption.

The fact that Ascalon was the only real sea-port of Philistia and the geographical center of its pentapolis is enough in itself to call up thrilling visions of the past. We see the swift low barks of the Sea-peoples, which the Hebrews called "ships of Tarshish," or Etruscan barks, approaching the coast with rhythmic flash of the oar. At a smoke-signal the Canaanites, both townsmen and villagers, flock to arms, terror-stricken by the sudden appearance of the feather-crowned sea-kings, just as the English, two thousand years later, sounded the tocsin at sight of the dreaded Norsemen. Not without reason did the priest chant on holy days, "From fire and sword, good Lord, deliver us," nor was it without cause that the Canaanites anxiously awaited an oracle of good omen from the goddess of their city, the Lady of Ashkelon. Hitherto the joint action of the Syrian princes, assisted by the Sardinian mercenaries of Egypt, had warded off the flood from the north—this time, however, all resistance was in vain; before the rushing javelins the irregular Canaanite line broke and fled. In

the villages the dark-eyed maidens huddled together, weeping for the bloody fate overhanging their brothers and lovers, or, dry-eyed, looking forward with beating heart and trembling limb to the day when they should be possessed by these strange heroes from the sea, and become by them the mothers of a new race.

Half a century later we find the Philistine immigrants from Crete, the Hebrew Caphtor, which more than four centuries later the prophet Amos still knew to be their home, firmly established in the southern plain, while their Sicilian allies, whom the Egyptians called Sikel, are found by the Egyptian envoy, Wen-Amon, in control of the Plain of Sharon. Apparently the Israelites grouped the latter with the Philistines, who formed the dominant element in the confederacy. About half way down the principal mound of the city on the water-front, the British excavators



The "Cannon" of Ascalon, ancient pillars imbedded in the wall

have discovered Philistine painted pottery of the same type as that found by Mackenzie before the war in Beth Shemesh, near Samson's home.

Gradually the Aegean culture of the Philistines succumbed to the encroachments of the adjoining Canaanite, Hebrew, and Phoenician civilizations, and their political autonomy, threatened by the Pharaohs of the twenty-first and twenty-second dynasties, as well as by the raids of the more warlike among the kings of Judah, such as David and Uzziah, was taken away by the Assyrians, who laid Philistia under tribute in the eighth century, and made it a province in the following seventh. In the same century the Assyrian Empire crumbled, as foreseen by the prophets, and the removal of the frontier garrisons in Cilicia and Commagene opened the way for an invasion of the hordes of the Scythians, under their king Madyas, whose terrible devastations gave Ezekiel the frame for his lurid picture of Gog and Magog. Ascalon suffered severely from the Scythian

inundation, as vividly described in the pages of Herodotus, but was saved perhaps from utter destruction by a deadly plague, which smote the northern hordes, unaccustomed to the diseases which curse civilization, with double force in the enervating subtropical climate of Philistia. As Judah was saved from an ignominious fall in the days of Hezekiah by the pestilence which decimated the Assyrian army, so again, though not recorded in Scripture, the Angel of the Lord smote the host of Ashkenaz and saved Jerusalem from premature destruction that she might live to fill out the measure of her iniquity.

Ascalon now fell successively into the hands of the Egyptians, the Babylonians and Persians; Alexander entered it and passed it as part of his heritage to the Diadochs, first to the Ptolemies of Egypt, and next to the Syrian Seleucids. By placing itself under the aegis of Rome it escaped falling into the fanatical hands of the Maccabees, and the shrines of Derceto and Dagon escaped the pollution by which the patriotic Jews yearned to revenge the stain of the heathen desecration of Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem. When Hellenization had once more triumphed in Judaea on the accession of an Idumaeen dynasty, Ascalon became part of Herod's kingdom. Herod beautified the city with marble edifices, and the Herodian age marks the climax of the prosperity of Ascalon during the Hellenistic period; the foundation of Caesarea diverted half the Palestinian trade from the southern port, and the importance of the latter gradually declined. In the Byzantine period there was a renaissance, and throughout the Muslim period Ascalon remained the chief seaport of Palestine, until its destruction by Saladin in the crusading epoch.

The historical importance of the city, and the fact that its site is not occupied by a modern town or village, as is the case with so many ancient cities, seemed from the very beginning of archaeological exploration in Palestine to lend Ascalon an unusual attractiveness in the eyes of the excavator. After a careful examination of the place shortly before the war, Mackenzie sent an enthusiastic report to the Palestine Exploration Fund. It is natural, therefore, that the return of peace, and the dawn of a new day of progress in the land should find an expedition on the site beginning a thorough investigation of the remains of the famous old city. The excavators could not have been more happily chosen. In charge of the work is the distinguished archaeologist of the University of Liverpool, John Garstang, the excavator of Meroe, now Director of the new Department of Antiquities in Palestine and head of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem, a scholar with a long experience of methods and material, obtained in Egypt, Ethiopia, and Syria. As a token of respect for his scientific work, and of appreciation for his services to France during the war, he has recently been decorated by the French government. Associated with Garstang is the gifted young Hellenist and archaeologist, Colonel Phythian-Adams. Thanks to the administrative skill of the Director, the first campaign has been conducted without friction, and at a surprisingly small outlay, considering the rise in wages which has partly compensated for the extraordinary rise in the cost of living.

The excavator's first task is to survey the ground and dig trial trenches; and, before undisturbed ancient strata can be reached, much unproductive debris must often be removed. Moreover, the autumn season is confined within narrow limits by the terrific heat of August in the coastal plain on the one hand, and by the beginning of the winter rains in early November on the other, so it is obvious that comparatively little can be expected.

Yet pessimism has been happily disappointed, and the initial results are most encouraging, promising a rich harvest of data and material bearing on the history and civilization of ancient Palestine, and all of it shedding light, directly or indirectly, on the Bible. Here will be discoveries to confute the sceptic and delight the scholar's heart, to extend our knowledge of our own past, and to illustrate many a passage of Holy Writ.

On the sea-front scarp, Phythian-Adams cut a section through the stratified remains of the ancient city, removing the débris step by step, in order to ascertain the exact sequence of pottery. At the very bottom he found a number of caves, cut in the soft sandstone, which at one time



Atlas supporting Victory

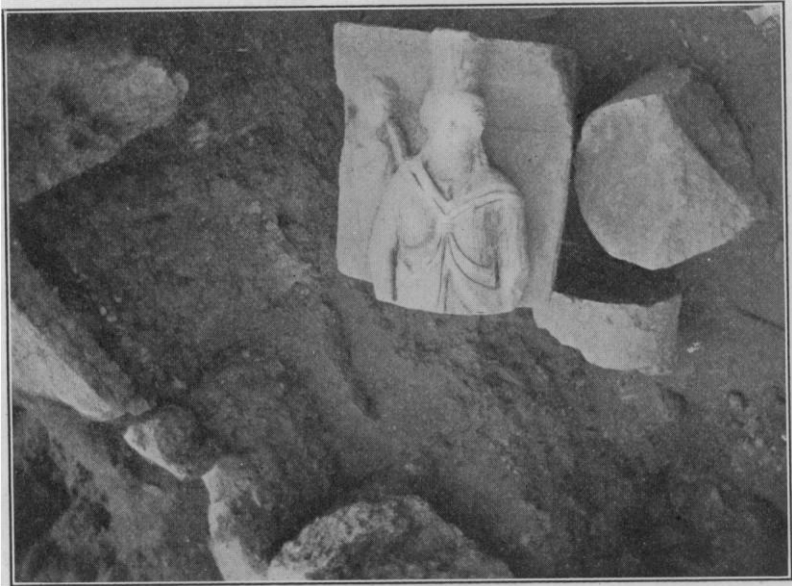
had served as human habitations, presumably in the neolithic age, when the Troglodytes occupied Gezer. The recovery of this early neolithic culture is reserved for future operations in Ashkelon. No traces were discovered of the early Canaanite period, before 2000 B. C.; in fact it is probable, though by no means certain, that the town was not founded until well along in the Amorite period of Palestinian history, about 2000 B. C. The top of the caves just mentioned had fallen in, and among the rubbish were found interesting potsherds, hand-moulded, with horizontal and diagonal red bands on a light brown surface, dating from the first part of the second millennium. Somewhat later were sherds of black-

punctured ware, which in Egypt always occurs in sites of the Hyksos period, so may be placed about 1700-1600 B. C. This ware, nearly always associated with a special form of pitcher, has been found also in Cyprus and Phœnicia, where the recent excavations of Contenau at Sidon show that it was common in the first part of the second millennium. Typical Canaanite pottery of all varieties also came to light, including many fragments of Phœnician (or Cypriote) pottery with a white slip, on which were painted "ladder" designs in bistre. Many pieces had pictorial designs of various kind—birds, antelopes, palmtrees, etc., providing new material for a future history of Palestinian decorative art.

Some two metres from the ground level, there was a sudden break in the pottery sequence, which up to that point had been continuous, with no interruptions. A clearly marked line, with streaks of ashes, showed that the old Canaanite and Horite Ashkelon had met with destruction, evidently at the hands of the Philistines. Above this line no more of the familiar Canaanite ware, white-slip and painted, appeared; instead, all was different. Many sherds of the characteristic banded ware, with decoration in metopé style between the parallel bands, were found. A new type of handle, pressed closely against the side of the vase, takes the place of the old handle. The principal decorative motives are the spiral, and a highly conventionalized sea-fowl, pecking under its left wing—a curious conception which reappears on multitudes of vases, not only from Ashkelon, but also from Beth Shemesh, Gezer, Libnah, etc. It is not the least sign of Mackenzie's perspicacity that, as a result of his work at Beth Shemesh, he labeled this type of pottery "Philistine." The principal reason for his certainty in the matter was the fact that he had worked in Crete and Greece, and recognized the Aegean provenance of the sub-Mycenean ceramics in question. While the imported pottery from the later Canaanite period is mostly Eastern Mediterranean, coming from Cyprus, Cilicia, and Northern Syria, the Philistine ware is unmistakably Aegean; the influence of trade and commerce had been replaced by actual migration of peoples bringing with them their culture and their crafts. Time was required for the new culture to fuse successfully with the old; a brick wall, built of bricks made with sand and ashes, showed that the Philistines at first were dependent upon local material for their constructions.

In the sacred precincts were found architectural fragments and sculptural *disjecta membra* in profusion; Christian iconoclasm and the quarrying operations of later builders have left us few pieces whole, but the remains are so numerous as to give the archaeologist hope of reconstructing the edifice in its pristine glory. It is the amusement of the excavator during leisure hours to draw columns, capitals, and architraves on cards, and shuffle them until some familiar architectural motive appears. Among the torsos of statues may be mentioned a fine Apollo. On huge slabs in bas relief are nearly perfect images of Nike, or Victory, standing on a globe borne by Atlas; of Irene, or Peace, with her palm-branch. Specially interesting is a similar figure of a goddess of the Isis type, with a calathus, or mural crown, on her head, and her infant son by her side. Probably we have here the representation, in Hellenistic fashion, of the Lady of Ascalon, Derceto, the *stella maris* and *turris eburnea* of ancient Philistia. Many romantic legends were told of her and her youthful lover, whom the Greeks called Ichthys, thus rendering the name of Dagon, male head of the Philistine pantheon. Dagon, whose name really refers

to the revivifying rains which he sent down upon the thirsty earth, was the great West-Semitic god of fertility in the third millennium, and his cult was cherished in Philistia and Phoenicia even into post-Christian times; in Philistia his name was explained by a pious calembour as "the fish-god," in Phoenicia by a similar process as "the grain-god." In honor of the holy wedding of Derceto and Dagon, representing the descent of the spring-rains into the bosom of Mother Earth, there was a vernal procession, which bore the images of the deities and bathed them in the sea, a common ancient Oriental custom. Even today, with the persistence of cherished customs in the East, the young men and girls of Jôra form in procession on a stated day in the spring, and go down to the sea, where they bathe



Tyche the Fortunes of Ascalon

unclad together. During the rest of the year, however, the modesty and chastity of these fellahs is proverbial.

The most important finds in Ashkelon belonged to the Græco-Roman period. Work was begun during the first part of the excavations at a point where pillars and other architectural elements were visible above ground; from the figure of Tyche discovered there, the place received the name "Tyche field." Here a complex of buildings from different dates was exhumed. The lowest structure was a colonnade from the Seleucid period, of simple, though respectable construction. In the early Roman period a new colonnade was erected, cutting across the older one at an acute angle. The material of which the colonnade was built consisted in large part of imported marble, and since the pillar shafts and capitals are very large, as well as in the best taste, an idea of the magnificence of the ensemble, and the munificence of the donor may be obtained. It is by no means impossible that the latter was Herod the Great, who is known to

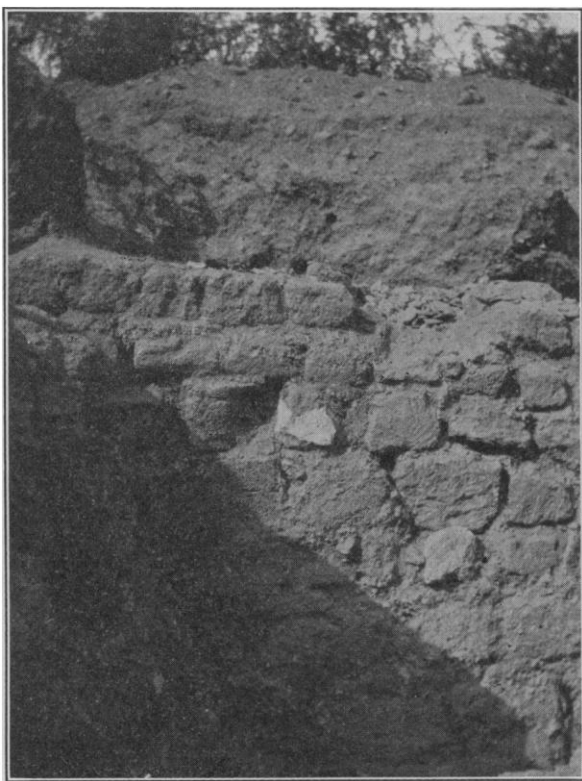
have lavished wealth upon the public buildings of his native city. At all events, the building belongs to the first century B. C. or the first A. D.

Let us return to mediæval Ascalon! The third stratum in the complex of buildings under discussion is a Byzantine theater, above which were remains of Arab structures, including a bakery. In another section of the site a Byzantine church of about the sixth century, later occupied by the Arabs, was investigated. In this connection it should be stated that the original idea of the explorers, according to which the "Tycheion" was built on the site of the *puteus pacis*, described in the sixth century by Antoninus Martyr, has not been confirmed by further investigations, and is now abandoned by the excavators. Another erroneous notion which has somehow gained currency in the press is that a giant marble foot, a metre in length, evidently belonging to a Roman emperor, perhaps Augustus, belonged to a statue of Herod. Even in Sebaste (Samaria) in the heart of Herod's own realm, Herod did not dare to erect a statue of himself, but instead raised a huge marble statue of the emperor; to have usurped the imperial prerogative would have been considered tantamount to rebellion, and Herod was far too prudent a politician to have risked his throne for so trivial an honor.

In the course of the work a number of inscriptions in Greek, Cufic and Hebrew were unearthed. By far the most interesting is a square piece of marble, commemorating the benevolent friendship (*eunoia*) of a Roman centurion of the famous Freresian legion, Aulus Instuleius Tenax. Since this legion was in Palestine during the Jewish Wars, taking part in the siege of Jerusalem, he may have been left in charge at Ashkelon after the great pogrom of the year 68 A. D., when the Jewish population of the city was practically wiped out. Hogarth has called attention to the interesting fact that our centurion visited the famous statue of Memnon at Thebes at dawn, March 16, 65 A. D., and heard the "voice" which issued from the statue at this time, according to the universal belief of antiquity, perhaps based on some actual phenomenon. The Romans were not content with scratching their names on the monuments, like the thoughtless modern tourist, but must needs hand down further details of their visit to an interested posterity, which forgives the vandalism for the sake of the information thus conveyed.

The site of Ascalon forms a semicircle whose diameter is the sea-shore. The center of the semicircle is occupied by a vast mound, which conceals the remains of Philistine antiquity. So far only a few cuttings have been made in the edge of the tell, where natural scarps facilitated the operation. The results of these cuttings have been unexpectedly great. At one point, stratum after stratum of the ancient city came to light, revealing the debris of city on city which had flourished in remotest antiquity, their prosperity fed by the perennial fountains which irrigate the fertile gardens and fields of the district. About half-way from the virgin soil appeared the remains of Philistine culture, of handsome painted vessels which recall at once the products of Cyprus and the lands of the Aegean during the closing centuries of the second millennium. Ashkelon is the first Philistine city to be excavated, so we may safely indulge in visions of discoveries which will dwarf the results hitherto obtained elsewhere by comparison. We may not see disinterred a Minoan palace in the style of Knossos in Crete, but we certainly will be rewarded by samples of the art and architecture of the land from which the Philistines came, and possibly—who knows—by mural paintings of the Minoan type illustrating

the wars between Philistines and Israelites which began with the settlement of the Sea-peoples in the country. Nor is it in any way a wild dream to hope for inscriptions in the Mediterranean script, or even for a bilingual in Cretan and old Phoenician or Hebrew. The Cretan script, with its thousands of unread inscriptions, has been partially deciphered by Sir Arthur Evans and Sundwall, who has for the first time successfully utilized the Cypriote script, also of the Mediterranean category, but employed to write the Greek dialect of ancient Cyprus. Our oldest Hebrew inscriptions are those from the reign of Ahab, found in Samaria, and the Baal-Lebanon text, from Cyprus, dating from the reign of Hiram, king of Phoenicia,



The circular wall of the Byzantine Theatre

the contemporary of Solomon. Recently, however, Petrie and Gardiner have recovered the long missing link between the Egyptian hieroglyphs and the Semitic alphabetic script in some votive inscriptions from Sinai, certainly from the middle of the second millennium, and thus antedating Moses by several centuries. Since the inscriptions belonged to Semitic miners and metal-workers, and the name "Kenite" means "metal-worker," it is very probable that Jethro, the Kenite, employed the same script, and taught it to his son-in-law, Moses. Interesting vistas open out before us here, and make the recovery of Palestinian archaeological material of more interest and importance than ever before.